DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 953 TE 001 611

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TITLE Teenagers' Attitudes Toward the First Amendment.
INSTITUTION Quill and Scroll Foundation, Iowa City, Iowa.
Pub Date [69]
Note 14p.

EDRS Price EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
Descriptors Censorship, Civil Liberties, Communism, Demonstrations (Civil), *Freedom of Speech, *Information Dissemination, *Journalism, Language Usage, News Media, Newspapers, Personal Values, Political Attitudes, Press Opinion, Propaganda, Publicize, *Secondary School Students, *Student Attitudes
Identifiers *First Amendment, Florida

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of teenagers toward the First Amendment, to compare the attitudes of Florida teenagers with those of non-Florida teenagers, and to compare the attitudes of journalism students with teenagers not in journalism classes. A total of 430 students from Florida high schools and 457 from high schools in other states completed a four-page questionnaire dealing with freedom of the press, criminal trial reporting, obscene words, derogatory statements, misleading advertisements, news of riots and demonstrations, and propaganda about communism. Conclusions from the study indicated that (1) teenagers have no precise understanding of the First Amendment in relation to press freedom, (2) they approve rigid controls incompatible with the First Amendment, (3) journalism students have no better understanding of freedom of the press than do non-journalism majors, (4) journalism instruction either de-emphasizes press freedom or is ineffectual in its attempts to interest teenagers, (5) teenagers in Florida resemble students in other states in their attitudes, and (6) teenager attitudes probably reflect the values and attitudes held by parents and teachers. (LH)

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TEENAGERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FIRST AMENDMENT

A Quill and Scroll Study

By Dr. Laurence R. Campbell

1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this inquiry by Quill and Scroll Studies is to:

1) Determine the attitudes of teenagers toward the First Amendment

2) Compare attitudes of Florida teenagers with non-Florida teenagers

3) Compare attitudes of teenagers in journalism classes with teenagers not in journalism classes

Since the study is limited in scope, it is not the intent to make any sweeping generalizations, although tentative conclusions may be suggested.

2. Method

With the cooperation of six high school teachers in Florida and six not in Florida, 4-page question sheets with answer sheets were circulated among teenagers in the spring semester of 1968 in:

1) Junior English
2) Senior English
3) Beginning Journalism
4) Advanced Journalism
5) English with a Strong Journalism Emphasis

It is not assumed that courses of a given name or given level necessarily have the same purposes, content, materials, or emphasis in different schools. The answer sheets were returned to the director of Quill and Scroll Studies who arranged for the compilation, tabulation, and interpretation of that part of the data related to the First Amendment.

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3. Scope of Studies

A total of 887 high school students participated, 430 of them in Florida, 457 in other states. Of the total, 37 per cent were boys; 63 per cent, girls; 72 per cent were 16 or 17 years old.

Florida high schools participating were:

Boone High School, Orlando
Edgewater High School, Orlando
Florida High School, Tallahassee
Wolfson High School, Jacksonville
Southwest High School, Miami
Plant High School, Plant City

Other high schools were:

Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois
Northside High School, Fort Smith, Arkansas
Northside High School, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Southside High School, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Broad Ripple High School, Indianapolis, Indiana
Piedmont High School, Piedmont, South Carolina

4. American Heritage

"Freedom of the press is a necessary part of our heritage." Teenagers were invited to check one of these answers to describe their reaction to this statement.

1) Strongly agree
2) Agree
3) Don't know
4) Disagree
5) Strongly disagree

Teenagers believe this statement or at least 66 per cent strongly agree and 21 per cent agree whereas 5 per cent disagree or disagree strongly and 8 per cent don't know whether they agree or disagree. See Table 1.

Floridian teenagers evince a slightly greater fervor in their support than non-Floridians. Students in journalism courses more often strongly agree than those in English classes. No comparison is made here of the specific schools, although data are included.

H. H. Remmers in Anti-Democratic Attitudes in American Schools (1963) reports that in 1960 only 29 per cent of the teenagers polled agreed with this statement: "Newspapers and magazines should be allowed to print anything they want except military secrets" whereas 51 per cent disagreed.

5. Criminal Trials

To what extent should newsmen and news media consider press freedom an essential part of the American heritage in reporting criminal trials? Teenagers were invited to report which of these positions they took:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control at all
4) For don't know

To be sure, the precise meaning of rigid control or some control of each answer may be somewhat uncertain. At the same time the prime concern is whether answers to this question are consistent with answers to the preceding question. See Table 2.

Nearly three out of four teenagers report that they are for rigid control or some control of the coverage of testimony at criminal trials, as Table 2 indicates. Floridians and non-Floridians show no significant difference. Journalism students responded with don't know more often than other students, but showed no great difference of attitude on this issue.

James R. Hickey and James E. Brinton in their 1967 inquiry for Quill and Scroll Studies - Media Habits and Attitudes Toward Media of Colorado High Scholl Students - obtained answers from 603 students. Of this number, 43 per cent favor rigid control of evidence preceding a criminal trial; 42 per cent, some control; 13 per cent, no control.

6. Obscene Words

To what extent should news consumers tolerate obscene, vulgar, or profane words in newspapers? Teenagers were given an opportunity to stand:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control at all
4) For don't know

More than three out of four teenagers favor rigid control or some control of obscene, vulgar, or profane words in newspapers. Students in beginning journalism are more insistent than those in advanced journalism. It would be heartening to know that teenagers exercise the restraints on themselves that they would impose on newspapers. See Table 3.

James R. Hickey and James E. Brinton in their 1967 inquiry for Quill and Scroll Studies - Media Habits and Attitudes Toward Media of Colorado High School Students - obtained answers from 603 students. Of this number 55 per cent favored rigid control of obscene words and pictures; 33 per cent, some control; 11 per cent, no control.

H. H. Remmers in Anti-Democratic Attitudes in American Schools (1963) reports that 52 per cent of the girls believe that the publication of objectionable material (sexy, profane, obscene, immoral, filthy, etc.) should be prohibited entirely. Only 27 per cent of the boys took this position.

H. H. Remmers also reports that in 1960 a poll of teenagers revealed that 60 per cent favored giving police the right to ban or censor books or movies.

7. Derogatory Statements

To what extent should news consumers tolerate the use of derogatory statements about people in the news? Teenagers were given an opportunity to stand:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control
4) For don't know

About one teenager in five favors rigid control whereas half of them favor some control. Nearly one in seven is unsure of himself. Whether they favor more control than there is, for example, stricter libel laws, remains to be determined. It would be heartening to know that they exercise the restraint in their own communication that they advocate for others. See Table 4.

James R. Hickey and James E. Brinton in their 1967 inquiry for Quill and Scroll Studies - Media Habits and Attitudes Toward Media of Colorado High School Students - obtained answers from 603 students. Of this number, 45 per cent favor rigid control of derogatory statements about people; 39 per cent favor some control; and 13 per cent favor no control.

8. False, Misleading Advertisements

To what extent should newsmen and news media exercise rigid control or some control in publishing false and misleading advertisements. Again the teenagers could stand:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control
4) For don't know

Nearly four out of five favor rigid control or some control over false or misleading advertisements. Floridians are slightly stronger for such controls than non-Floridians. Non-journalism students give less support to such controls than do other students. See Table 5.

James R. Hickey and James E. Brinton in their 1967 inquiry for Quill and Scroll Studies - Media Habits and Attitudes Toward Media of Colorado High School Students - obtained answers from 603 students. Of this number, 78 per cent favored rigid control; 18 per cent, some control; and 3 per cent, no control of false statements in advertising.

9. News of Riots, Demonstrations

To what extent should news of riots and demonstrations be subjected to controls? Teenagers again could stand:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control
4) For don't know

Almost one student in five favors rigid control and almost two out of five favor some control, as Table 6 indicates. There appears to be significant difference between attitudes of Floridians and non-Floridians or between those in journalism courses and those not in such courses. See Table 6.

10. Propaganda About Communism

To what extent should propaganda about communism be subjected to controls? Teenagers were given the opportunity to stand:

1) For rigid control
2) For some control
3) For no control
4) For don't know

Two out of five teenagers favor rigid control and nearly three out of four favor either rigid or some control. Journalism students appear to be slightly stronger in support of rigid control than other students. To be sure, both terms are used to mean what the users intend them to mean. See Table 7.

James R. Hickey and James E. Brinton in their 1967 inquiry for Quill and Scroll Studies - Media Habits and Attitudes Toward Media of Colorado High School Students - obtained answers from 603 students. Of this number, 58 per cent would rigidly control statements promoting communism, 26 per cent advocate only some control, and 14 per cent favor no control.

H. H. Remmers in Anti-Democratic Attitudes in American Schools (1963) reports that 61 per cent of the teenagers polled believed that cities should pass laws against printing or selling any communist literature. In the same year one-fourth of them believed that the government should prohibit some people from making public speeches and 30 per cent that the government should not allow some petitions to be circulated. In 1960 a poll showed that 63 per cent of the teenagers believed that a communist should not be allowed to speak in peacetime.

11. Conclusions

These tentative conclusions may be advanced:

1) Teenagers actually do not appear to have a precise understanding of what the First Amendment means so far as press freedom is concerned.

2) Teenagers appear to be willing to approve various rigid controls of newspaper content incompatible with the First Amendment.

3) Teenagers in Florida in this respect are more like than unlike other teenagers participating in this study.

4) Teenagers who have studied journalism do not appear to have a better understanding of press freedom than other teenagers.

5) Journalism instruction either gives little emphasis to press freedom or it is ineffective in its attempts to interest teenagers.

6) Whatever the attitudes are, they probably reflect the attitudes in the American homes and American schools, those of parents and teachers, including journalism and English teachers.

If a free people and a free press are inseparable, our society in the hands of today's teenagers may move toward authoritarian rather than libertarian theories of communication. If this sample reflects the attitudes of other teenagers in the United States, it is evident that our efforts to educate teenagers for democracy are falling short of our ideals. The teenager is more disposed to accept rigid controls than were the men who wrote the First Amendment or the great jurists of the U. S. Supreme Court who have interpreted it.

TABLE 1.--Attitudes of teenagers toward press freedom as part of our heritage

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
All	66	21	8	3	2
Florida	68	19	7	3	2
Non-Florida	65	23	7	3	2
Junior English	59	28	9	1	3
Senior English	70	20	4	3	3
Beginning Journalism	64	18	5	4	9
Advanced Journalism	75	15	5	1	4
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	64	24	5	0	7
Edgewater--Orlando	69	23	0	0	8
Plant High--Plant City	79	16	4	0	1
Florida High--Tallahassee	60	30	7	0	3
Wolfson--Jacksonville	60	21	5	7	7
Southwest Miami	80	10	5	4	1
Boone--Orlando	67	18	6	3	6
Northside--Fort Wayne	73	14	7	3	3
Northside--Fort Smith	66	18	5	5	6
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	64	25	6	0	5
Southside--Fort Wayne	54	35	2	2	7
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	77	18	1	1	3
Piedmont--South Carolina	48	32	10	4	6

TABLE 2.--Attitudes toward presentation of testimony of criminal trials

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	31	42	11	16
Florida	30	42	12	16
Non-Florida	31	42	9	18
Junior English	38	39	10	13
Senior English	28	44	11	17
Beginning Journalism	31	39	13	17
Advanced Journalism	20	49	8	23
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	32	37	19	12
Edgewater--Orlando	22	43	14	21
Plant High--Plant City	32	40	7	13
Florida High--Tallahassee	34	38	14	14
Wolfson--Jacksonville	27	47	12	14
Southwest Miami	29	47	12	12
Boone--Orlando	34	37	16	13
Northside--Fort Wayne	26	42	5	27
Northside--Fort Smith	34	37	11	18
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	31	35	24	10
Southside--Fort Wayne	27	48	10	15
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	24	52	9	15
Piedmont--South Carolina	39	39	4	18

TABLE 3.--Attitudes of Teenagers toward use of obscene, vulgar, or profane words in newspapers

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	40	37	11	12
Florida	39	40	11	10
Non-Florida	42	34	11	13
Junior English	39	36	15	10
Senior English	39	43	9	9
Beginning Journalism	45	31	13	11
Advanced Journalism	35	41	4	20
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	34	32	24	10
Edgewater--Orlando	47	36	6	11
Plant High--Plant City	47	37	4	12
Florida High--Tallahassee	24	45	23	8
Wolfson--Jacksonville	44	36	11	9
Southwest Miami	37	46	10	7
Boone--Orlando	38	40	10	12
Northside--Fort Wayne	45	26	8	21
Northside--Fort Smith	34	45	9	12
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	34	36	25	5
Southside--Fort Wayne	44	41	6	9
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	52	37	2	9
Piedmont--South Carolina	43	23	50	14

TABLE 4.--Attitudes of teenagers toward use of derogatory statements about people in the news

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	22	51	14	13
Florida	19	54	14	13
Non-Florida	23	49	15	13
Junior English	20	47	18	15
Senior English	19	58	13	10
Beginning Journalism	27	47	14	12
Advanced Journalism	22	51	5	22
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	15	48	22	14
Edgewater--Orlando	26	57	6	11
Plant High--Plant City	20	61	7	12
Florida High--Tallahassee	8	62	19	11
Wolfson--Jacksonville	19	55	13	13
Southwest Miami	19	61	10	12
Boone--Orlando	25	40	19	16
Northside--Fort Wayne	23	43	12	22
Northside--Fort Smith	29	43	15	13
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	13	52	26	9
Southside--Fort Wayne	10	67	16	7
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	27	56	11	6
Piedmont--South Carolina	26	42	13	19

TABLE 5.--Attitudes of teenagers toward false and misleading advertisement

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	57	21	10	12
Florida	59	23	9	9
Non-Florida	56	20	10	14
Junior English	55	25	11	9
Senior English	64	20	6	10
Beginning Journalism	52	22	13	13
Advanced Journalism	48	20	8	24
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	66	17	7	10
Edgewater--Orlando	69	22	0	9
Plant High--Plant City	67	16	5	12
Florida High--Tallahassee	62	18	10	10
Wolfson--Jacksonville	51	24	8	12
Southwest Miami	51	29	19	10
Boone--Orlando	58	33	11	8
Northside--Fort Wayne	40	26	9	25
Northside--Fort Smith	64	12	12	12
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	66	20	7	7
Southside--Fort Wayne	54	27	10	9
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	65	15	11	9
Piedmont--South Carolina	51	21	12	16

TABLE 6.--Attitudes of teenagers toward news of riots and demonstrations

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	19	37	24	15
Florida	19	35	32	14
Non-Florida	20	39	26	15
Junior English	22	37	29	13
Senior English	19	36	30	15
Beginning Journalism	17	38	29	16
Advanced Journalism	26	37	19	18
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	15	20	51	14
Edgewater--Orlando	14	41	32	13
Plant High--Plant City	20	35	22	23
Florida High--Tallahassee	12	38	35	15
Wolfson--Jacksonville	25	30	32	13
Southwest Miami	22	39	29	10
Boone--Orlando	19	32	37	12
Northside--Fort Wayne	20	39	21	20
Northside--Fort Smith	22	37	28	13
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	16	24	48	12
Southside--Fort Wayne	19	27	35	19
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	12	49	26	13
Piedmont--South Carolina	26	46	12	16

TABLE 7.--Attitudes of teenagers toward propaganda about communism

	Rigid Control	Some Control	No Control	Don't Know
All	40	32	12	16
Florida	39	34	13	14
Non-Florida	41	29	12	18
Junior English	39	29	18	14
Senior English	38	39	10	13
Beginning Journalism	43	31	8	18
Advanced Journalism	40	15	17	26
English with Strong Journalism Emphasis	34	32	17	17
Edgewater--Orlando	14	41	32	15
Plant High--Plant City	20	35	22	23
Florida High--Tallahassee	12	38	35	15
Wolfson--Jacksonville	43	32	10	15
Southwest Miami	41	34	10	15
Boone--Orlando	45	30	13	12
Northside--Fort Wayne	37	30	9	24
Northside--Fort Smith	42	27	13	18
Evanston Twp.--Evanston	31	32	21	16
Southside--Fort Wayne	52	29	8	11
Broad Ripple--Indianapolis	48	28	16	8
Piedmont--South Carolina	35	33	11	21